

Moran, Gabriel. *Religious Education as a Second Language*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989. Pp. 254. \$14.95.

Moran claims that "this book is an answer to the question: 'What is the meaning of religious education?'" Actually, Moran's argument makes us suspicious of any such *answers*, and the treatise would more accurately be described as philosophical *reflections on*—the likes of which are his trademark—the meaning of religious education. The reflections carry specific ideas and persuasive suggestions to be sure, but they begin an open-ended and even preliminary discussion that evades the precision of an answer.

Moran delights in exploring language and meaning. "My arguments are almost always about the meanings of words," he acknowledges. He believes that "the most important changes in the world spring from restating questions, distinguishing terms, and uncovering deeper levels of meaning." Returning to topics and themes familiar in his previous works, he seeks here to "uncover" both what *is* meant and what *might be* meant by an endeavor such as religious education. His aim is to expand and enrich meaning by resisting definition so that he can "develop a language of religious education" that will start a conversation joining multiple nations, religions, generations, and institutions.

As Moran sees it, we cannot move toward this goal unless we change the fundamental language we use to ask educational questions. This means that we cannot just ask how we can improve on the present way we do religious education (or education in general), we must also question whether our understanding is as rich and appropriate as it might be. Moran particularly exposes the way that education has been narrowly associated with the schooling of children with a fixed purpose (or product) and point of termination. Corresponding to this view of education is an understanding of teaching that tends to consist of "big people telling little people what to believe." Remarking that "the only way to safeguard learning is to widen the meaning of teaching," Moran works to stretch our concepts of teaching and education throughout the book.

His expanded notion of education emphasizes the "interplay of forms" (i.e. family, schooling, job, retirement) rather than the activities of a designated teacher. In the parish, religious education would be a life-long process, resulting in the "professionalization" (to varying degrees) of everyone and the "elimination of the laity." A Catholic religious educator who has practiced his profession in parochial schools and secular colleges, Moran invites more dialogue between sacred and secular realms for the religious educational benefit of both.

On the way to his goal of widening meaning, Moran bids us to look at both those people that control the language and those that are the "excluded voices of the present." While definitions "reflect the success of one group in being able to speak for humanity," uncovering meaning can call upon voices who open up the discus-

sion and break apart (often oppressive) definitions. Following his own (valuable) advice, Moran is sensitive to the voices of women and looks internationally to Britain. He could do more. He does not call upon the wisdom of folks whose experience would dramatically "restate questions," such as those with praxis orientations who might question so many words about meaning that are distanced from concrete *practice*.

The book is full of good questions (such as what it means to teach *morally* rather than what it means to teach *morality*) and powerful insights (for example his critique of the image of "making" in the first chapter). However, Moran's plunge into meaning is risky. In his effort to "let in more meaning," Moran at times obscures that meaning. He plays with too many words (faith, nurture, teaching, education, morality, profession—to name a few). And, while resisting definition, he makes numerous distinctions (for instance, the one between homiletic and therapeutic speech that approaches a dichotomy) that limit without the benefit of clarifying.

These risks come with the territory. Moran, his thesis statement aside, makes no pretensions of offering a complete system. He himself feels "more like a beginner who is just starting to see how the pieces fit together." The reader will not finish the book with an answer to the central question, "What is religious education?" However, she or he will be more aware of the range of issues that are involved in moving with the question.

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Brown, G. Thompson. *Christianity in the People's Republic of China*. rev. ed. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986. Pp. xii + 248. \$9.95.

This is the best single-volume survey yet written on the history of Chinese Christianity during the communist revolution. It includes a pithy introductory summary of the whole history of the church in China since its Nestorian beginnings in the 7th century, and a helpful chronology, but its great value is the balanced, unsentimental yet sympathetic way in which the author outlines and describes his subject: the stormy, controversial years from the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 to the death of Mao in 1976 and the first dramatic decade of the "opening to the West" which followed.

Two chapters trace the roots and rise of the revolution with commendable honesty. The rest of the book deals directly with its effect on Christians and the church. Brown divides this major emphasis of his history into three chapters on the Mao revolution to 1976, and three chapters on the first post-Mao decade to 1986.

The first stage, "Christianity and the New China," 1949-1956, deals with the shocks of adjustment to a communist government which officially promised religious liberty but equally officially declared its antagonism toward religion. It de-

scribes the hopeful efforts of Protestants and Catholics to preserve a visible church witness without fatal surrender to state control.

The second state, "The Great Leap Forward," 1956-1966, saw a hardening of communist pressures as the economy faltered, and freedom of speech was briefly granted and quickly withdrawn. Protestants moved toward unification into a denominationless form of public Chinese Christianity, the Three-Self Patriotic Association. Roman Catholics were forced into a more radical change which required severance of ties to the Vatican and the organization of what became the "Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association."

The third stage covers "the ten lost years" of the "Proletarian Cultural Revolution," 1966-1976. All churches were closed, whether Three-Self, or Patriotic Roman Catholic. Thousands were forced into prisons or work communes. The cult of Mao flourished. But hidden from sight, and largely unknown to the outside world, meetings in house churches began to multiply across the country.

1976 was a year of pivotal change into a fourth stage. The death of Mao ushered in what seemed to be the beginning of a whole new era. Brown's three chapters on the ten years after Mao, from 1976 to 1986, were written and revised before the Tien-An Men Square incidents and catch with first-hand intensity the exhilaration and surging growth of Chinese Christianity which followed the discrediting of the violent excesses of the cultural revolution.

Particularly valuable is the even-handed way the book deals with the tensions between two kinds of Protestant survivors: the Three-Self Movement which kept a national, visible witness to the faith alive but in so doing became vulnerable to charges of compromise, and the fast-growing House Church Movement which preserved the faithful independence of its informal meetings at the cost of an almost complete loss of trained leadership. How each movement dealt with its own problems, and how each began to reach out to the other—not without pain and not yet with conspicuous success—is important reading for anyone who tries to understand the present church situation in China.

The author does not attempt to judge between the various claims made about church growth in China, but sensibly contents himself with terming it "phenomenal." He reports that at the beginning of the revolution in 1949, the accepted figure for the total Christian community (Protestant and Catholic) was five million. By 1985 Catholics alone were estimated at three to eight million. Protestants, who were a smaller one-third of the total in 1949, now "almost certainly" outnumber Catholics, he says, and quotes estimates in the mid-1980s which vary wildly from a "rock-bottom" figure of four million to as much as twenty-five million. The latter number, he thinks, "seems highly inflated" (pp. 78, 187).

Libraries should make sure that they have the revised edition, conveniently identified by a yellow stripe on the cover. It corrects an imbalance in the first edition by enlarging its coverage of Catholic and House Church Christianity.

Few authors in the west are better equipped to give us this first-rate survey.

Brown was born in China, served in Korea as a Presbyterian missionary, was called back from Asia to lead his denomination's board of world mission, and is now an associate professor of World Christianity at Columbia Theological Seminary.

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p. 113-15



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